

T.R.B.

from

Washington

The Second War

★ Gilbert Stuart's George Washington extended a benevolent arm on one side; Martha looked down graciously on the other. President Washington exhibited a bad case of five-o'clock shadow, and the need of a new upper plate, but he smiled gamely at what was going on. Below him President Johnson was holding a full-scale press conference in the simple elegance of the White House East Room, all white and gold and glitter. There is something regal about LBJ, when you stop to think of it, on top of all his other contradictions. In a lot of ways last week's press conference had the aloof mystique of Charles de Gaulle, laced with Texas colloquialisms. Americans, observed the President firmly at one point, aren't going to "tuck our tails and run home."

He was speaking of Vietnam and has been talking about it a good deal, suddenly, which is a good thing. He has moved from tight-lipped reluctance to explain and a position which implied that we seek unconditional surrender. His Baltimore speech offering "unconditional discussions" was a great step forward. Now he and other top officials are trying to make the public understand our bombing policy.

The policy boils down to this: We are bombing military, largely non-civilian targets, not to enlarge the war but to restrict it, and primarily to force the conflict to the conference table as soon as possible.

Richard Rovere in *The New Yorker* the other day said that Johnson probably wants to negotiate the Vietnam war as badly as does Bertrand Russell. Maybe this goes a bit far but it does

indicate our agonizing dilemma. Hans Morgenthau on one side, and the war-hawks on the other, seem to have solutions. This department doesn't see any simple solution.

Washington is gobbling up two books, *The Making of a Quagmire*, David Halberstam (Random House, \$5.95), and *The Ambassador*, Morris L. West (William Morrow, \$4.95). Both are about Vietnam, one non-fiction, the other fact masked as fiction. Both men are civilized liberals, Halberstam a brilliant war correspondent, West a perceptive Australian. Neither wants a pull-out; neither thinks this is a war we can win militarily; neither hopes for much more than a position of strength from which we can negotiate.

The factor that comes out in both books, and out of a speech made here last week by Harvard professor John King Fairbank, director, East Asian Research Center, is this: In East Asia the Chinese Communists have liberated an Idea. You can't smother it. You can't napalm it. You can't ignore it. The Idea is stronger than mortars or howitzers or troops or helicopters. They are military, this is political. The only way you can fight an Idea is with another Idea.

Fairbank calls it the "village-based revolution." Halberstam says, "There is something to the Viet Cong besides terror, something more to winning a revolutionary war than helicopters." Graham Greene, back in 1955, describing Hanoi said, "We talk so glibly of the threat of the individual, but the anonymous peasant has never been treated so like an individual before. Unless a priest, no one before the commissar has approached him, has troubled to ask him questions, or spent time to teach him. There is something in Communism besides the politics." It is a system, says Fairbank, that "expends enormous energy on personal proselytism."

Maybe America is too deep in the military quagmire even to fight this second war. And suppose we do, do we have the willingness, the idealism, and the patience for it? Well, Americans are adaptable and Vietnam is jolting us badly. It is a good and astonishing sign that the US Chamber of Commerce here last week suddenly adopted a proposal

urging the US government to open up "channels of communication with the people of mainland China."

Government vs Business

★ President Johnson announced that the forthcoming deficit will be a billion dollars less than expected. Whoops! shout the editorials. We don't like it. Here's why. You have to think of the government as a huge business. People are the stockholders. The "business" is going to grow - vastly. A big chunk of government debt is investment. It goes into roads, post offices, dams, slum clearance.

Every year the huge AT&T, another business, increases its debt. Its plant was \$727 million in 1950; around \$2.5 billion last year. Was this reckless, was this profligate? No; stockholders would have sued if AT&T hadn't expanded and gone into debt.

Indications are the big USA Co. isn't expanding fast enough. The most acute sign is unemployment. It has ranged around five percent for years (nearer eight to ten percent if part-time unemployment is included). A fifth of the nation is poor. We aren't faced with inflation; actually, most economists expect an economic slowdown in six months or so.

The growth rate isn't high enough. Oh, all right, the stock market is soaring and things look pretty good right now (if you have a job). But the labor force is growing 1.7 percent a year; productivity 3.5 percent, while the over-all economy (GNP), is not keeping up. If a recession did come unemployment would jump fast.

These aren't fly-by-night statistics. The authoritative Council of Economic Advisers probably understates it when it says we are producing \$30 billion or so below our potential. What it means is that if the private sector doesn't do the job the government should.

★ Note: Finally, a word about Edward R. Murrow. He was the gentle, perfect knight of nicotine-stained fingers. He was what all reporters wanted to be. He told us what London in flames looked like and, in March, 1954, what McCarthy looked like. Some think McCarthy never recovered.